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Attention: Special Assistant Julie Ruterbories

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TAGS: [CMGT](#) [APER](#) [AMGT](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: Nomination of Jeff Lodinsky for the 2009 Barbara M. Watson Award

¶1. Embassy Baghdad is proud to nominate Consul General Jeff Lodinsky for the 2009 Barbara M. Watson Award. Jeff supervises one of the most stressful, demanding and unusual Consular operations in the world. Through his leadership in Baghdad, the diverse, multi-national staff has achieved remarkable, even historic milestones and bilateral breakthroughs: the resumption of student, exchange visitor and almost all NIV processing for the first time since 1991; the resumption of immigrant visa processing for the first time in a generation; the first outreach trips across Iraq in at least 30 years; extensive media outreach; the start of SIV processing and the processing of thousands of Special Immigrant Visas; the expansion of the Passport Agent Program; and the processing of thousands of passports for our brave soldiers. Jeff also set up a shuttle service for consular customer access into the International Zone (unique in the world), negotiated an expansion of visa reciprocity, secured Panel Physician contracts, maintained compassionate lines of communication with hostage family members and provided assistance to American citizens across war-torn Iraq. Across all consular functions and in service to the largest U.S. embassy in the world, Jeff led a section that, according to the visiting OIG inspection team, "...successfully provides a wide range of services while operating under conditions and challenges unlike any other in the world...and this is a tribute to the enthusiastic leadership of the consular chief."

¶2. Consular Baghdad took on greater importance as the embassy begins to implement the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA). Jeff and his staff worked in direct support of SFA implementation; a key component of our emerging and maturing bilateral relationship. Implementing the SFA has been accompanied by a significant increase in bilateral coordination, and resultant consular involvement, much of which is tied to SFA-related exchanges and programs. With each visa representing an important bilateral building block, Jeff regularly met with senior representatives of Iraqi ministries and agencies to ensure the prompt handling of diplomatic applications and the accurate completion of application forms. Fully 95 percent of all Baghdad NIV applications require an SAO and when worldwide SAO processing delays affected our cases, Jeff drafted several front channel cables to inform the Department of its impact and made the case for more equitable treatment of this key strategic partner. He also worked with CA/VO/L/C to communicate front office requests and to develop a high profile list ("the best of all posts," according to L/C) to manage the crush of urgent expedite requests. He drafted a series of position papers for the SAORRB in which he recommended common-sense modifications to outdated SAO tripwires. Jeff initiated intense negotiations with the Government of Iraq to expand visa reciprocity and coordinated the successful effort with CA/VO/F/P.

¶3. Diplomatic relations between the United States and Iraq were suspended in 1991, and most consular services were still inactive when Jeff came to post. Our diplomatic surge in Iraq was being frustrated as applicants had to travel outside of Iraq to access visa services--even our vulnerable interpreters and translators, those most threatened by assassination and kidnapping. This journey left several dead or wounded. Jeff was determined to introduce visa services in Baghdad, but he faced some unique challenges. Given our location within the tightly cordoned International Zone applicants' location within the tightly cordoned International Zone applicants are unable to access the embassy. To resolve this problem, Jeff

convened a series of meetings with security representatives and the U.S. military to come up with a viable access plan. Jeff created an escorted, secure shuttle system to gather applicants at a military checkpoint--this secure shuttle system is the first of its kind anywhere in the world.

¶4. Iraq matters because it occupies a central role in the Arab world. Our country's influence on future generations starts with Iraqi students traveling to the U.S. to study. Iraq's "10,000 Student Scholarship Program" provided us with an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to the next generation of Iraqis. Ambassador Crocker and I challenged Jeff and his team: find a way to interview all students here in Baghdad. In August, months prior to the official opening of the New Embassy Complex, a significant moment in the embassy's post war history. Ambassador Crocker and the Minister of Education cut the ribbon in the Consular Section, in view of the international media, to inaugurate student visa processing in Baghdad.

¶5. Since at least the 1980s, all IV applicants had to apply outside Iraq at regional embassies. Jeff was determined to implement SIV/IV processing in a coherent, methodical but safe manner. He assembled his consular team to map out a strategy and worked seamlessly with NVC, CA/VO/L/P and Embassy Amman. We now have the capacity to process up to 7,000 primary applicants per year. In February 2009 we reached an important milestone when we commenced regular immigrant and diversity visa processing in Baghdad for the first time in a generation.

¶6. Jeff and his staff soon found themselves confronting other challenges. The number of Americans returning to a more stable Iraq increased dramatically, and with them came complex child abduction cases, arrests, kidnappings and, tragically, deaths. The number of American civilians who die in Iraq is in the double digits. Jeff recognized that our ability to assist American citizens was not sufficient. Jeff identified several officers stationed at PRTs to act as "consular first responders." He worked with

HR/CDA/SL/PAS/T&R and CA/EX/PAS to secure Consular Titles to perform basic emergency services.

¶7. Every week brings a new ACS challenge. In order to resolve a complex child abduction case in Basra, Jeff asked an officer there to meet with the abducting parent and eventually escort the child to Kuwait. A/S Janice Jacobs praised this coordination as an example of "tireless support to reunite a mother and daughter." As lead State representative on the Hostage Affairs Working Group Jeff regularly spoke with family members of American hostages. In heartbreaking conversations, Jeff communicated our commitment never to give up the search for their loved ones. Jeff met with American citizens at the Iranian refugee camp at Ashraf to ensure they were provided with direct consular assistance and the option to depart Iraq. He also led an effort to train and authorize military attorneys to accept passport applications on the battlefield so that soldiers do not have to travel to Baghdad.

¶8. Consular work is incomplete if practiced only within bunkered security walls. Jeff organized the first-ever outreach by an American consul to the Kurdistan Region and Tikrit. His high-profile meetings with hundreds of students, educational and business leaders, college faculty, the sizable American citizen community and the media underscored Embassy Baghdad's commitment to this politically sensitive region. The RRT team leader wrote to say, "Thank Jeff for being willing to come north and meet with people face-to-face. His example set the right tone for his staff. Following his lead, Jeff's consular officers embarked on outreach trips to Hillah, Camp Victory and have planned trips across the country. Jeff met with virtually every Iraqi news outlet during his tenure, speaking authoritatively and persuasively on a range of consular issues.

¶9. Empowering a largely entry-level staff to take ownership of initiatives was critical to the consular section's success. Jeff kept me informed and then gave his staff the authority to take the initiative. The OIG wrote, "Section morale is much higher than expected and this is a tribute to the enthusiastic leadership of the consular chief...the staff conduct their business with an amazing sense of 'can do' and team spirit." Jeff instituted a scheduled training period, mentored the all-ELO staff and then ensured their emotional needs were addressed by asking post's Mental Health Practitioner to visit the section for a group consultation. His LES staff, most of whom were TDY on loan from around the world, were sharply focused, enthusiastic and innovative--a tribute to Jeff's leadership and managerial style. Citation: "For his leadership in

mentoring his all entry-level officer corps, reestablishing a functioning, full-service consular section at Embassy Baghdad and for providing critical assistance to the American forces stationed in Iraq and to the American citizen community."

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